

Pastoral-Liturgical Aspects in the Study of Baptism in Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's Works

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Abstract: Fr. Alexander Schmemmann has often interpreted the content of the Holy Sacraments, attempting to restore to the hearts and minds of the faithful their essential value for the Christian life. Paradoxically, the danger of secularization is not the main obstacle in the path of today's Christian, but his own perception of how the grace of the Holy Spirit works through the liturgical services. The Baptism Mass, although considered to be crucial for the beginning of the Christian life, is no longer interpreted as having a determining role in the whole existence of the believer. The Russian theologian asserts that we are confronted with an absence of Baptism from our community life and emphasizes the need to rediscover the baptismal theological meanings of the early Church. Today, the evident disinterest of the majority of Christians in the deeper meanings of the Sacrament prevents the graces received at Baptism from working with the minds and hearts of new converts. Baptism is effective as a Sacrament, but its long-term effect is hindered by the secularized mentality of Christians, who avoid liturgical participation and, by implication, stagnate that of their own children.

Keywords: Holy Sacraments, The Holy Baptism, The Mystery of Chrismation, The Holy Eucharist, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

1. Preliminaries

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann has shown in his work dedicated to the Mystery of Holy Baptism² that *for a long time, the theological and spiritual interest in Baptism was, in fact, detached from its cosmic significance, from the totality of man's relationship with the world, being explained as man's liberation from*

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² Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, *Din apă și din duh. Un studiu liturgic al Botezului*, trans. Rev. Prof. Ion Buga (Symbol, 1992).

*original sin, and was given an extremely narrow and individual meaning: the means by which man's individual salvation is secured.*³ Thus, the consequences of this distorted vision did not take long to appear, but were immediately felt: from an act of the whole Church, encompassing the whole cosmos, Baptism became a private ceremony performed in a corner of the church following a “personal program,” and in which the Church was reduced to the “minister of the Mystery,” and the cosmos to the three symbolic drops of water, considered as necessary and sufficient for the validity of the mystery.⁴ In this sense, Father Schmemmann considers himself obliged to highlight and revalorize two essential and determining valences of this Holy Sacrament.

The first is the relationship between Holy Baptism and the feast of Easter. In the early Christian ages, the Mystery of Baptism was celebrated on Easter night as part of the great annual feast of Easter, and the two were closely interdependent. The joy that illuminates the holy night of Easter when the victorious proclamation “Christ is risen!” is the joy of those who have been baptized into Christ and have clothed themselves in Christ, of those who *through Baptism were buried with Jesus in his death, that they too might rise to “new life”* (Rom 6:4), *just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father* (Rom 6:4). The liturgical celebration of this feast originally flowed from the celebration of Holy Baptism. In this sense, Lent was nothing other than a period of preparation of the whole Church for the reception of the newly baptized⁵, the new members of the community, of those who believe in Christ and confess him as their Head. And this fact is also emphasized by the biblical readings that precede this holy feast⁶, for this preparation, which used to last from one to three years and involved the whole community. It was the period of final and intense preparation for the holy night, the culmination of which was precisely the “enlightenment” of those who came to Christ and sought new life and salvation in him.⁷ Easter commemorated the beginning of a new life which dawned with the Resurrection of Christ from the tomb and was given to us on the day of Baptism. Thus Easter celebrates an event that happened and is still happening with us. For we have each received the gift of this new life, the power to receive it within us and to live according to its ordinances.⁸

³ Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii. Sfintele Taine și Ortodoxia*, trans. Rev. Prof. Dr. Aurel Jivi (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2001), 80.

⁴ Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii*, 81.

⁵ Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, *Postul Mare*, trans. Andreea and Laurențiu Constantin (Bucharest: Doris, 1998), 12.

⁶ Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1960), 70-113.

⁷ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 35.

⁸ Schmemmann, *Postul Mare*, 13.

The second defining aspect of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism is that it is actually celebrated within the divine worship or Christian community. From the very beginning, Christian worship has been understood as *a collective work involving and actually participated in by the Church's assembly, that is, the whole community*.⁹ In this sense, in the early Church, Baptism was celebrated only in worship (especially on the eve of major Christian feasts) and was closely linked to the Divine Liturgy.¹⁰ Being absent from the Divine Liturgy, Baptism is absent from our faith. The Christian, in ancient times, knew that Easter was every year the anniversary of his own Baptism, of his participation in the life of the Risen One.¹¹

2. Preparation for Receiving the Sacrament of Holy Baptism

In the life of the Church, preparation is a constant and essential aspect in all its matters. There is a twofold cycle of preparation and fulfillment, which is essential to liturgical worship because it reveals and translates into reality the dual nature and function of the Church.¹² The Church is first and foremost a preparation because its purpose is to make us sharers in an eschatological reality: the Kingdom of God. In this sense, the worship of the Church is essentially and permanently a preparation:¹³ it always tends to go beyond itself, beyond the present, and its function is to lead us to this preparation and thus to transform our life, making it dependent on its fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.¹⁴ But, on the other hand, it also appears as a fulfillment: the events that gave rise to it and are at the origin of our faith have already taken place. Christ has come, and in him man has been divinized and exalted to heaven.

In this sense, by preparation for Baptism we must understand *an act of the Church, a recapitulation by the Church of all that makes baptismal regeneration possible*,¹⁵ for the whole Church is changed, enriched, fulfilled when a new member is integrated into its bosom, becoming a member of the body of Christ. And this period of preparation was inaugurated in the ancient Church by the institution of catechumenate.¹⁶

⁹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 28.

¹⁰ Rev. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, *Liturgica specială pentru institute teologice* (Bucharest: EIBM-BOR, 1980), 359.

¹¹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 28.

¹² Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 36.

¹³ Rev. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, "Cultul ortodox ca mijloc de propovăduire a dreptei credințe a dragostei, a păcii și a bune înțelegeri între oameni," *Studii Teologice*, no. 9-10 (1953): 626-643.

¹⁴ Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii*, 147-48.

¹⁵ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 38.

¹⁶ Metropolitan Dr. Laurențiu Stresa, "Slujba Botezului în ritul liturgic ortodox și în cel catolic," *Studii Teologice*, no. 9-10 (1973): 685-698.

In the ancient Church, anyone who wished to become a Christian was brought before the bishop by his godparents,¹⁷ i.e. by the members of the Christian community who became guarantors of the good faith and seriousness of the intentions of the person interested in being baptized, of the authentic character of his conversion.¹⁸ The bishop, who was at the same time priest, spiritual guide and educator of the whole community, ensuring the seriousness of the intentions of the convert, entered his name in the register of catechumens.¹⁹ He made the sign of the Holy Cross three times over the catechumen's face and placed his hand on his head. This first rite of reception signified that Christ was receiving this person, writing it in the "Book of Life."²⁰ According to St. John Chrysostom, this reception, in his time, took place at the beginning of Lent.²¹ The prayer said afterwards²² reveals the real dimension, the true content of conversion. In the first place, it means to flee from this world, which has been taken away from God by the enemy and has become a prison. Conversion is not a conversion at the level of ideas, but a real one, meaning *escape from the night of despair*. It is an act of protection: the hand of the bishop – symbolizing the hand of Christ – protects, covers the neophyte, for he is about to engage in a terrible battle for salvation.²³

Then, after being inscribed in the Book of Life, he is informed of the ultimate purpose of Baptism: the return to true life, which man has lost through sin. Salvation through the acquisition of the virtues of faith, hope and love, the return to true life through the denial of the *old deceit*, the gift of eternal life as an inheritance from God and the reward of keeping the commandments, and the placing under God's permanent protection are the dimensions of Baptism that we discover in this preparatory part of the liturgical ordinance.

3. Exorcisms

Exorcisms are the beginning of the battle, the first and most important dimension in the Christian life.²⁴ The Church has always affirmed the demonic

¹⁷ Metropolitan Dr. Laurențiu Streza, *Tainele de inițiere creștină în Bisericile Răsăritene* (Iași: Trinitas, 2002), 44.

¹⁸ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 39.

¹⁹ Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 20.

²⁰ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 40.

²¹ Thomas Finn, *The Liturgy of Baptism in the Baptismal Instructions of Saint John Chrysostom* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 50-51.

²² *Molitfelnic* (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1998), 17-18. This prayer is attributed in some older manuscripts to St. Gregory the Wonderworker, see T. Tarnavski, "Scurtă explicare a ritului Sfântului Botezului și al Sfântului Mir," *Candela* (1985): 419.

²³ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 41.

²⁴ Four in number, these prayers are said for the removal of every demonic work from the one who comes to Baptism. The first two are recited facing westward (the place of the devil), because

dimension, even if this direct knowledge has not been systematized in a clearly defined doctrine, because it is almost impossible to define the irrational rationally. When trying to explain what the devil is, Fr. Schmemmann resorts to the love-hate dialectic: *Just as there can be no love without a person who loves, there can be no hate without a person who hates. And if the ultimate mystery of good resides in a person, the ultimate mystery of evil must also reside in a person. Behind the dark and irrational presence of evil there must be a world of personal beings who have chosen to hate God, the light, by being adverse. The origin of evil in this sense is not ignorance or imperfection, but, on the contrary, knowledge and a degree of perfection that makes the temptation of pride possible.*²⁵

In the service of Baptism, which is an act of deliverance and overcoming, exorcisms come first because on our way to the baptismal font, we will inevitably encounter this dark and powerful entity that opposes our path. When the priest's hand touches the child's head and makes the sign of Christ over it, the devil is there, seeking to defend what God has taken from him and wants to keep in his power.²⁶

The words spoken in prayer, in which the imperative verb predominates, express the power and the importance of the word in the Church.²⁷ According to St. John Chrysostom, exorcisms are *fearful and marvelous invocations*, the manifestation of a *frightful and terrible* power that destroys the evil power of the satanic world.²⁸

The beginning of man's restoration is realized through deliverance from the power of Satan. But its fulfillment is the heavenly kingdom where man has been received by Christ, in such a way that ascension to heaven, *communion with God and deification* have truly become man's ultimate vocation and destiny.²⁹ When the exorcism of the catechumen takes place, the priest *blows three times over the mouth, forehead and chest*³⁰ of the person being baptized. Breathing is the

they address him directly, cursing him and banishing him from the catechumen, in the name of God, and the other two face eastward because they are addressed to God. The last prayer includes a special formula of exorcism, which is repeated three times, and is accompanied by the blowing and marking, in the image of the Cross, over the forehead, mouth and chest of the infant (*Streza, Tainele de inițiere*, 104).

²⁵ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 43-44.

²⁶ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 45.

²⁷ John Breck, *Puterea cuvântului în Biserica Dreptmăritoare*, trans. Monica E. Herghelegiu (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1999), 13-14.

²⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, II, 14, trans. Harkins, in *Ancient Christian Writers* 31 (Westminster, 1963). See also Rev. Prof. Ene Braniște, "Explicarea Botezului în Catehezele Baptismale ale Sfântului Ioan Hrisostom," *Studii Teologice*, no. 7-8 (1970): 509-27.

²⁹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 48.

³⁰ *Molitfelnic*, 22.

essential biological function that keeps us alive, a function which, on the other hand, makes us totally dependent on the world. Or the world is terribly marked by evil and death. Even the very air we breathe is purified and, in the act of exorcism, becomes pure and pure again, pure and God's gift; life is restored to its dependence on God, as the gift that God gave to man in the beginning.³¹

The casting away of Satan is a ritual that used to take place shortly before Baptism proper, on Good Friday or Holy Saturday, and was the very end, the crowning of the whole period of catechetical preparation.³² Turning the neophyte to face westward – the place where the sun sets and symbol of darkness and Satan's domain³³ – the catechumen's confrontation with him takes place, because the exorcisms have allowed him to renounce him, to reject him. The catechumen is stripped and barefoot.³⁴ He sees disappearing everything that in his eyes covered the state of a slave, everything that made him believe that he was a free man, unaware of his slavery. From now on he realizes that he was a captive, and captives are naked and barefoot. The raised arms signify the power of Christ, the fact that he desires from now on to become Christ's servant.³⁵

4. Union with Christ and Confession of the True Faith

The catechumen turns to the East. If facing the West meant facing Satan and darkness, the East, the place where the sun rises, represents man's return to the dawn of the eighth day, his conversion to Christ, the Light of the world.³⁶

Then the actual union with Christ takes place. The Greek word is *syntaxis*, which means adherence, our attachment to Christ, a word contrary to apostasy. The formula of union implies more than a psychological unity: it is a confession of personal attachment to Christ, a commitment to serve him, an oath like that taken by soldiers.³⁷ And the formula *I believe Him as a King and God* shows that this decision was made once and for all, there being no reassessment or revision from

³¹ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 48.

³² Saint John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, XI, 19. They are related to the Passion of Christ: "For on Friday at the ninth hour the thief entered into heaven; the darkness that lasted from the sixth to the ninth hour was dispelled; and the Light pierced in body as well as in spirit was sacrificed for the whole world. For at that hour Christ said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Then the sun that we see looked at the sun shining on the Cross and withdrew its own rays".

³³ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 49.

³⁴ *Molitfelnic*, 21.

³⁵ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 49.

³⁶ Rev. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, "Rânduilele Bisericii Ortodoxe cu privire la Taina Botezului și Mirungerii și explicarea lor," *Mitropolia Olteniei*, no. 3-4 (1969): 194.

³⁷ Braniște, "Rânduilele Bisericii Ortodoxe," 53.

time to time. The Catechumen confesses his faith in Christ "as King and God."³⁸ To believe in Christ as God is not enough, for even devils believe in him (Jn 2:19). Accepting Him as King means following Him and dedicating your whole life to serving Him, living according to His commandments.³⁹

The Catechumen pronounces the Symbol of Faith, which is nothing other in its content than the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol. These symbols or confessions of faith first appeared and served, in the context of preparation for Baptism, as a summary of the initiation received by the candidates during the seven weeks preceding the Paschal ceremony of their entry into the Church.⁴⁰ The Confession of Faith contains the faith of the Church and not of individual members. It is the faith of the Church, and only because it is the faith of the Church is it also the faith of the one to be baptized as a living member of the Church. The confession of faith takes place before the celebration of the sacrament, since it is the faith on the basis of which and in which the one brought to Baptism will be baptized.

Next comes the breathing and spitting on him and the worship in the name of the Holy Trinity. By these preparatory acts the candidate is now ready for the great trial to come: that of death and resurrection, in the likeness of the death and resurrection of the Savior Jesus Christ.

5. Water Sanctification

Baptism proper begins with the solemn blessing of the water, which reveals to us the full dimension of the Mystery, its content and its cosmic depth. In other words, it is the sanctification of water that manifests the real value of Baptism, revealing its relationship with the world and with matter, with life in all its aspects.⁴¹

In Fr. Alexander's vision, water represents a whole threefold symbolism:⁴²

a. Water has a cosmic dimension: there can be no life in the cosmos if there is no water and that is why primitive man identified water with the principle of life, seeing in it the *prima esentia* of the world (Gen 1:2). Water is the underlying matter of all creation.⁴³ It is from the work of the Holy Spirit on water that all the definite forms of created existence came into being.

³⁸ *Molitfelnic*, 23.

³⁹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 54.

⁴⁰ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, second edition (London: Longmans, 1960), 30-61.

⁴¹ Fr. Schmemmann points out that this restrictive view of Baptism has led to its presentation and, implicitly, to its understanding in theological textbooks as a magical act, ceasing to be the fundamental principle and unchanged "source of reference" of worship and faith, because it has been cut off from its very essence: the "mystery of water," which gives it its true context and meaning (Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 65).

⁴² Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 65.

⁴³ See Alexandros Kalomiros, *Sfinții Părinți despre originile și destinul cosmosului și omului*, trans. Rev. Dr. Ioan Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998), 13-15.

[It was] an indefinite energy, unenlightened by any determination, but in universal movement, unsolidified in any way, having in it, by creation, the ratios of all forms of existence, created and sustained after the image of the ratios of the creative and conserving Logos. The divine Spirit, representing the same fluidity on the spiritual plane, causes the original water to actualize the forms inscribed in it virtually by the creative act of the Logos, into forms which show in them in a definite manner the images of the Logos' ratios.⁴⁴

b. Water symbolizes the destruction and death: the nebulous depth is that which kills and destroys, the dark habitat of satanic powers, the very image of the irrational, the uncontrollable and the elemental in the world.

c. Water is the principle of purification, and therefore regeneration and renewal. It removes stains by recreating the primal purity of the earth. It is the Holy Spirit who reunites with the waters in order to effect in them a mysterious transformation, to make them capable of communicating the divine, and to enable them to become the springs of life and divinization for those who benefit from them.⁴⁵ And the manifestation of the divine presence in matter and in the world, and implicitly the re-sanctification of creation, takes place with the Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan, when he united *the Spirit in him actually with the water*, and thereby with all creation. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae insists on the role of the Holy Spirit in pneumatizing "intensely the liquid reserve of the universe" in order to give man the possibility of rebirth to new life through Baptism. The beginning in this respect was made by Jesus Christ. Thus, "the incarnate Son of God, although he had no need of this rebirth by Baptism, since he was born from the beginning of the Spirit, accepts Baptism for us men, in order to be the first man to be baptized of water and of the Spirit. By this, he has united the Spirit in him actually with water, as the bosom and sustainer of life, this time of life not subject to death, since he is fully united with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites himself for Christ anew, at his Baptism, with water and with all creation, intimately bound to him. Man is thus reborn both from the Spirit and from cosmic matter, since water represents this matter in a liquid state, as a reserve, as the bosom of every form of organized existence. Baptism has a cosmic significance. It means that matter itself, restored to its spiritual mobility, becomes the medium of the creative Spirit, free, ever new in his acts."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, volume 3 (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1997), 25.

⁴⁵ Rev. Prof. Ilie Moldovan, "Botezul ca și chemare la asemănarea cu Hristos. Consecințele Botezului asupra vieții ecleziale și morale (implicații catehetice și misionare)," *Revista Teologică*, no. 3 (1992): 12.

⁴⁶ Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, volume 3, 27.

All the saving acts accomplished by Christ are recapitulated in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, revealing its true meaning: cosmic, ecclesiological, and eschatological.⁴⁷ Cosmic because Baptism is the mystery of the new creation, ecclesiological because it is the mystery of the Church, in the communitarian sense of the word, and eschatological because it is the mystery of the Kingdom. In fact, it is one and the same ecclesiological reality in its three aspects. By recreating in Christ and in the Spirit the whole universe, Baptism makes man, for whom it has recreated the universe, dwell in Christ and in the Spirit. This universe recreated in Christ at the Resurrection appears at Baptism as the creation which will be at the end, it is the end itself which will be revealed, anticipated, made real for us in mystery from now on, and in this way makes us from now on to live in the Kingdom of God on earth.⁴⁸

The blessing of the water begins with a solemn doxology: *Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages*,⁴⁹ which announces the theme and ultimate goal of Baptism. The mystery appears as a passage, a journey, and the initial doxology reveals and announces the destination of this journey: the Kingdom of God.⁵⁰

The prayer of blessing and consecration of water could be called Eucharistic prayer.⁵¹ It is an act of solemn praise and thanksgiving, an act of adoration by which man, on behalf of the whole world, responds to God. It is this Eucharist and this adoration which takes us back to the beginning, which makes us true witnesses of creation. For the act of thanksgiving is truly man's primary and essential act by which he fulfills himself as man.

This prayer, which begins with an *exclamation*, *Great are you, O Lord, and marvelous are your works, and no words can suffice to praise your wonders*,⁵² proclaims once again *the world as what Christ has revealed it to us to be and what he has made it to be: God's gift to man, the means of man's communion with God*.⁵³ It has three parts: it is a prayer of putting before or introduction, analogous to that which always opens the prayer over the bread and wine.⁵⁴ This act of

⁴⁷ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 66.

⁴⁸ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae says that "the water of Baptism is in a hidden way the matter of the age to come, which will carry in it the Son as the living and living hypostasis and the Spirit with His life-giving and ever new energies" (Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, volume 3, 27).

⁴⁹ *Molitfelnic*, 29.

⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 67.

⁵¹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 73.

⁵² *Molitfelnic*, 33.

⁵³ Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii*, 89.

⁵⁴ Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, trans. Rev. Boris Răduleanu (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993), 163-217.

thanksgiving takes us to Paradise, for it restores in us the principle and essence of our being, our life and our knowledge.⁵⁵ Then we move on to the anamnesis, the recapitulation and at the same time the recollection of the principal saving events by which God restored human nature. The focus is on the Incarnation of the Savior, an event which constitutes *the memory of man forever*.⁵⁶ And it is precisely this memory, that is to know and receive Christ, faith in him, communion with him, that is salvation. In man's response, the whole of creation glorifies God once again, it becomes a place of his revelation, of his epiphany. The waters of creation, polluted by sin, symbol of death, are now shown as the waters of the Jordan, as the beginning of new creation and salvation. Although the whole world has fallen into the dominion of the "Master of this world," it is the water, the primordial element, the "deep" that remains the place and home of this power. Water also represents the death and baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, it is the beginning of his descent into hell, the beginning of the struggle against death. The Jordan represents all waters: the cleansing of the Jordan is cosmic victory.⁵⁷

Then follows the epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit: *Thou, O King, lover of men, come now with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and sanctify this water*.⁵⁸ If in the beginning the neophyte was exorcized, now this is done on water, the symbol of its dependence on the world and its submission to the powers of the opposing powers. From the Christian point of view, matter cannot be neutral. If it is not related to God, i.e. considered and used as a means of communicating with Him, of living in Him, it becomes a dwelling place for demonic powers.⁵⁹

Finally, its sanctification takes place. Christ came not to replace natural matter with supernatural and sanctified matter, but to restore and fulfill it as a means of communion with God. The water blessed in Baptism takes the place of the whole of creation, representing the whole of creation, but as it will be in the end,⁶⁰ when it will be consummated in God. Sanctification *is always the manifestation, the Epiphany of this Eschaton, of this further reality by which the world was created, which was perfected through Christ in His Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, and which the Holy Spirit reveals today in the Church and which (reality) will be fulfilled in the Kingdom to come*.⁶¹

After the water has been blessed, it is sprinkled with blessed oil. Thus, the oil becomes first of all a symbol of life, not in the primary sense of existence,

⁵⁵ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 74.

⁵⁶ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 74

⁵⁷ Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 47.

⁵⁸ Molitfelnic, 33.

⁵⁹ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 76.

⁶⁰ Rev. Prof. Ilie Moldovan, "Botezul ca și chemare," 13.

⁶¹ Schmemann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 77-78.

but in the sense of fullness, of joy and of participation in this mysterious essence of life that we experience. Here again the order is similar to that of water. First there is the exorcism of the oil, its liberation, its return to its real function, which is accomplished by the priest blowing three times, making the sign of the Holy Cross over the vessel of oil. Then follows the anamnesis-remembrance of the significance of the oil in the history of salvation and the thanksgiving.⁶²

Finally, the anointing takes place, which signifies the re-creation of man, of his body, of his body parts, of his senses, for Baptism is first and foremost *the reconstitution of man in his integrity, the re-creation of the soul and the body*.⁶³

6. Sinking Into the Water

The entire immersion in the holy water signifies the mystical participation in the Death and Resurrection of the Savior Christ.⁶⁴ This succession which takes place with man at Baptism, appears to be reversed only when we understand our death as death to sin, as the death of the old man. It is our complete surrender to God, so that we no longer live to ourselves, but exclusively to God. The death of the old man and the birth of the new man from God are thus almost simultaneous. Therefore, there is no distance between death and the beginning of new life in Baptism. The ancient Church was aware that through Baptism we really die and rise with Christ. The Holy Spirit sanctifies and re-creates the baptismal water in order to impart to the neophyte, in the act of his birth from God, and to the ecclesial community, the mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection. We can say that what commands the whole baptismal celebration is the setting of the liturgical ethos of the community itself in the person of the neophyte, that is, in his new humanity. With each baptized person the Church gains a victory, for with each neophyte God conquers a universe and, in each neophyte, God saves an entire world.⁶⁵ In the ancient Church the purpose of the sacraments was the building up of the people of God as the body of Christ. Creation is nothing other than "the eschatological epiphany of the fullness of the Kingdom, the announcement of the day of the Lord."⁶⁶ The water of Baptism thus becomes the "image" of the new life of the new creature, of the new reality that the risen Lord has brought. It is in this reality that the neophyte is immersed, revived, regenerated and initiated

⁶² *Molitfelnic*, 34-35.

⁶³ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 81.

⁶⁴ Saint Nicolae Cabasila, *Viața în Hristos*, trans. Rev. Prof. Dr. T. Bodogae (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1997), 51.

⁶⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Despre Facerea omului*, trans. Rev. Prof. Dr. T. Bodogae, in *PSB* 30 [Părinți și scriitori bisericești: Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa – Scrieri II] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1998), 46.

⁶⁶ Rev. Prof. Ilie Moldovan, "Botezul ca și chemare," 14.

into the Kingdom of God, as an aspirant to the life of this kingdom. Conceived as a mystery of regeneration and re-creation in Christ, Baptism is also seen as a mystery of the integration of the catechumen into the people of God, revealing itself at the same time as a passage from the old life to the new.

The immersion three times in the font and the recitation of the baptismal formula by the priest expresses both our faith in the Holy Trinity and symbolizes the three days during which the Lord was in the tomb.⁶⁷ By being immersed in the water we imagine our death for our life in sin until now and our burial with Christ, and by coming up (coming out) of the water we imagine our resurrection with Him, to the new life in Christ.⁶⁸ Immediately after the immersion, the newly baptized is clothed in a white garment which liturgical texts and patristic explanations call the garment of light, the royal robe, the garment of immortality.⁶⁹ This is one of the oldest rites of Baptism and in the ancient baptismal explanations it occupies a very important place.

The classic textbooks say only that the white garment symbolizes the spiritual purity and virtue towards which every Christian should strive in the course of his life. But this presentation seems to us to be incomplete, for the ritual adds nothing to Baptism itself. But what it does communicate – in Father Schmemmann's view – is *the total newness of this virtue, of this new spiritual life for which the neophyte has been recreated by baptismal immersion and which will now be offered to him through the gift of the seal of the Holy Spirit.*⁷⁰

The true meaning of this liturgical act is revealed by the context, that is, every liturgical act receives its meaning from the one that precedes and the one that follows. In this sense, the rite of the bright garment – which in the ancient Church lasted eight days after Baptism, a period during which these garments had to be worn by the neophytes⁷¹ – completes and seals Baptism itself, the act of putting on the white garment corresponding to the gesture of stripping off the old garments⁷² which the catechumen makes before entering the water of redemption, and on the other hand this inaugurates the second part of the ministry of initiation: the Anointing, the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁷³

⁶⁷ Thomas J. Scirghi, *An Examination of the Problems of Inclusive Language in the Trinitarian Formula of Baptism* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 121-72.

⁶⁸ Braniște, *Liturgica specială*, 373-74.

⁶⁹ Saint John Chrysostom, *Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites*, II, 25, trans. Antoine Wenger, in *SC* 50 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1957): 147.

⁷⁰ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 108.

⁷¹ Braniște, *Liturgica specială*, 374.

⁷² Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit*, trans. Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 1999), 91.

⁷³ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 110.

7. The Mystery of Chrismation

The Mystery of Chrismation is the conclusion, the fulfillment, the crowning of Baptism. Through it begins the manifestation of Christ in the behavior of the baptized person. By reciting the formula *Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit*, the baptized person is anointed⁷⁴ with the Holy Chrism, making the sign of the Holy Cross on: forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, ears, chest, back, hands, feet. Fr. Schmemmann observed that *when the sacramental formula uses and has always used the singular, "gift," the theologians, when defining this sacrament, all speak of "gifts" in the plural; the mystery, they say, bestows on the neophyte the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For them, the two words gift and gifts seem to be equivalent.*⁷⁵

The novelty and uniqueness of this sacrament is that it bestows on the baptized person not only one or another gift, or certain gifts of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit Himself as a Gift.⁷⁶ It is the Holy Spirit and not some divine power. It thus becomes a *personal Pentecost*,⁷⁷ and in this anointing of personal Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon us and abides in us as the personal gift of Christ, coming from His Father, the gift of His life, of His Sonship, of His communion with the Father. Christ is the Anointed One, and we receive his anointing. Christ is the Son, and we are adopted as sons; Christ has in him the Spirit who is his life, and we are received to share in his life.⁷⁸

This highlights the significance of the word seal (σφραγίς),⁷⁹ the term used in the primary era to designate this mystery: it is the imprint in us of the One to whom we belong; it is the seal that guards and protects in us the precious presence and fragrance of Christ. Affirming that the Christian life is Christ's life in us, as well as our life in Christ, affirms at the same time our identification with his humanity as well as raising ourselves to an affinity with him. By being in Christ, who is King, Prophet and Priest, we are also, after Baptism, made kings, prophets and priests.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Rev. Cyrille Argenti, "La Chrismation," *Contacts*, no. 2 (1982): 103. At the beginning this sacrament was administered by the laying on of hands (Acts 9:17-18). But as the number of Christian communities multiplied, the practice of anointing with Holy Chrism became generalized, see Metropolitan Dr. Liviu Streza, "Taina Mirungerii în Biserica Ortodoxă și în Bisericiile Vechi-Orientale," *Ortodoxia*, no. 2 (1987), 65.

⁷⁵ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 115.

⁷⁶ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 115.

⁷⁷ Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii*, 91.

⁷⁸ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 115-16.

⁷⁹ See "σφραγίς" in G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume 7, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 939-953.

⁸⁰ Saint Athanasius the Great, *Treatise on the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in *PSB 15* [Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești: Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare – Scrieri

a. *The kingly dignity*: by re-baptizing man from water and the Spirit, Baptism re-creates him as lord, because his nature, from the moment of the first creation, is to be lord of the whole creation (Acts 1:28).⁸¹ Man becomes *the king of* a new creation. As a king, man is not the possessor of a new gift of lordship, but he has also received a higher vocation: that of being a co-worker with God in a divine work, his commitment to a work which Christ himself accomplishes in the world. Fr. Schmemmann calls this concept “anthropological maximalism” (Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 119). It was formulated from the very beginning by the Church, against the Gnostics, by emphasizing the truth that salvation is not of the spirit apart from the world, but of the whole world which man pervades in its entirety. At the opposite pole is a negativistic spirituality whose ultimate source is the fear and rejection of God’s creation as man’s kingdom.⁸² But this call to the kingdom also embraces the mystery of the Cross. The creative miracle enters through the Cross back into existence. The Cross is at once the crucifixion of Christ for the world, but also the revelation of the Lord’s enthronement as King, the final condemnation of evil, but also the beginning of the salvation of the world and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.⁸³ The kingly anointing truly makes us kings, but it is the crucified kingly dignity of Christ Himself – the Cross as kingdom and the kingdom as Cross – and it is this that the Holy Spirit pours out upon us in the Mystery of the Chrismation. The Cross signifying the enthronement of Christ as Emperor is revealed to us as the only way for us to be enthroned with him, to regain our kingly dignity.

b. *The kingly priesthood*: the dignity of the king is to have power and dominion, and that of the priest to offer sacrifices, becoming as such the mediator between God and creation. The kingdom is perfected in the general priesthood, and this priesthood in its turn is fulfilled in the natural lordship, the expression of man’s essential will to be in intimate communication with God, bringing to God what he has previously received from God. Man has by his very nature a priestly dimension which, after being betrayed and lost through sin, is restored and perfected in Christ. He has restored in Holy Baptism our priesthood, which is nothing other than the power to offer “our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God” (Rom 12:1) and to make our whole life a “wise spiritual ministry” (Rom 12:1).

IJ] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1987), 92. Saint Athanasius says in this sense: “In his own image, He (God) made them (men) by giving them also power and the power of his own Logos, so that remaining faithful to the Logos, as a shadow and becoming rational, they have the power to be able to remain in a state of blessedness”.

⁸¹ On this dignity or vocation received by man through the act of creation see Nellas, *Omul*, 69.

⁸² Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 119.

⁸³ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 127.

The royal priesthood is eminently communitarian in character. The mystery of the Church, the mystery of the Body of Christ, consists in the fact that we are the Church, we make it up,⁸⁴ since Christ is in us as in his members, and as such, although he is above us, by his cosmic and historical character, he is not apart from us. The first reception of the Holy Spirit is through the Mystery of Holy Baptism, which incorporates us into the Risen Christ. Consistent with this truth is the idea that baptism is entrusted to the Church, the priests themselves being the priests of the Church. The believer no longer relies on himself, he is baptized in and for the community that receives him into its arms, drawing him from the waters sanctified by the Spirit of God.

c. The gift of knowledge and prophecy: the prophetic ministry of the Savior is imparted to the neophyte, becoming his own vocation. If in the Old Testament this vocation is reserved only to certain men, in Christianity it is given to all who identify with the Lord's humanity. Seen from the perspective of vocation, prophecy is "the gift of describing God's will, of hearing his voice, and of being in creation the witness and agent of divine wisdom."⁸⁵ The gift and vocation of prophecy belong, on the one hand, to the human being restored in Christ, but they also belong to divine grace, to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the baptized person.⁸⁶ The gift itself must be regarded as a means of participation in a great divine mystery, in which a new organ of perception appears, with the spiritualization of all the human senses, an organ indispensable to the supreme goal of a most blessed union with Christ. He receives the power to know the truth about God and the world and its ultimate destiny, the power to understand the real meanings of things. The sensation of spiritual joy which determines this ultimate knowledge is felt by the neophyte as soon as he comes out of the water of Baptism, knowing God through direct communication and acquiring a knowledge with transforming powers, thus revealing his union with Christ.

The anointing with the Holy Chrism is for us the elevation to royal dignity, ordination to the royal priesthood and the obtaining of the gift of prophecy. We receive all this because the Holy Spirit is the gift that Christ gives us, Himself being King, Hierarch and Prophet.

8. The Baptismal "Procession"

In ancient times, Baptism and Anointing did not take place in the Church or its porch, but in a separate building, called the *baptisterion*.⁸⁷ Immediately

⁸⁴ Schmemmann, *Eucharistia – Taina Împărăției*, 21.

⁸⁵ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 140.

⁸⁶ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 143.

⁸⁷ Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 37.

after the anointing, the newly baptized, dressed in a white garment and holding a candle, were led by the bishop and other clergy into the Church, where the faithful awaited their arrival to begin the celebration of the Paschal Eucharist.⁸⁸

Today, in liturgical worship, we have a similar procession at the end of Baptism and one at the beginning of Easter. At the origin of the two processions, there was only one: the entry of the newly baptized into the Church from the baptistery, which in the old liturgical tradition marked the beginning of the feast of the Resurrection,⁸⁹ and this was indeed a beginning, not only chronologically but also spiritually.

Fr. Schmemmann points out that due to the dissociation of this primary ceremony, the two liturgical acts have lost their symbolism and have moved away from their meaning. Thus, “the encircling of the table and the font at Baptism is explained as a symbol of spiritual joy, or of eternity due to the Holy Trinity, etc. As for the Easter procession, it becomes the symbolic representation of the journey of the myrrh-bearing women to the tomb.”⁹⁰ As for the post-baptismal procession, in the current practice of the Church, it has become a mere add-on, adding nothing to the significance of Baptism. Even in its present form, it remains an essential element of the Baptismal Liturgy, truly its “last epiphany.”⁹¹ “As many of you have been baptized into Christ, put on Christ,” which is sung during this procession,⁹² is the same hymn that replaces the Trisagion in the Easter liturgy, which clearly shows the clear link between Baptism and the Eucharistic assembly. This is also supported by the biblical readings: the text of the Apostle and the Baptismal Gospel are Easter texts, the same as those spoken at the Easter Liturgy on Holy Saturday. The key symbol for understanding this ritual is, in Fr. Schmemmann’s view, the closed church door. In ancient times, when the service of Baptism had taken on its full paschal expression, the *kingly doors* were called those at the entrance to the church, because the church as a whole and not only the Holy Altar represented the Kingdom of God for the faithful. And it was precisely the rebirth in water and in the Spirit and the Holy Communion that opened to the neophyte the door to this Kingdom, a door closed because of man’s alienation from God through sin.⁹³

⁸⁸ Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii*, 93.

⁸⁹ Streza, *Tainele de inițiere*, 108.

⁹⁰ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 154. Those who have resorted to this “illustrative symbolism” have inaccurately used scriptural truths: the miraculous women went to the tomb early in the morning and not at midnight, thus mutilating the meaning of worship and liturgical acts.

⁹¹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 155.

⁹² *Molitfelnic*, 38.

⁹³ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 156.

9. The Holy Eucharist, the Crowning of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation

It has been observed that Baptism is truly accomplished in the procession towards the Church and the Eucharist: participation in Christ's Passover, "at His table, in His kingdom," for, as we have seen, in the beginning, Baptism, Communion and Eucharist formed a whole, a single liturgical whole, a complex liturgical rite, for each of these mysteries is fulfilled in the other two to such an extent that it is almost impossible to understand the meaning of one independently of the other two.⁹⁴ If Chrism crowns Baptism, the Eucharist signifies the crowning of Chrism, which is not to be understood here as validity in itself, but as "the dynamic, existential and spiritual correlation of these mysteries in the new life received from Christ."⁹⁵ In Baptism, we are reborn of water and of the Spirit, and this birth opens us to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which opens us access to the Church, enabling us to sit at Christ's table in His Kingdom. We are baptized in order to receive the Holy Spirit; we receive the Holy Spirit in order to become members of the Body of Christ and to grow in the bosom of the Church until we become fully Christian.⁹⁶

The Holy Eucharist is the center and source of spiritual life in Christ, because in it the union with Christ is complete, being transfigured and Christified the whole man, in all his dimensions, with all the senses and psychosomatic functions united with Christ in a profound union.⁹⁷ All that we receive through the other sacraments is perfected in the Eucharist, and because of its cosmic dimension the whole universe is transfigured. Through Baptism we are incorporated into the Church. But if the ultimate nature and essence of the Church is revealed in and through the Eucharist, which is really the Mystery of the Church, then necessarily to enter the Church is to enter the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is really the fulfillment of Baptism. Their entrance becomes the act of being joined to the gathered community, for the Church is assembly, reunion. The Eucharist is *reunion or more precisely, the Church itself as union in Christ*.⁹⁸

10. Conclusions

Father Schmemmann believes that the Mystery of Baptism began to be marginalized as soon as it was separated from the Mystery of the Eucharist,

⁹⁴ Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, volume 3, 56-57.

⁹⁵ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 161.

⁹⁶ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 161.

⁹⁷ Nellas, *Omul*, 151.

⁹⁸ Schmemmann, *Euharistia – Taina Împărăției*, 17-20.

and this total separation today between Baptism and the Divine Liturgy has led Christians to no longer give this sacrament of initiation into the Christian life the importance it deserves. Baptism no longer enjoys a liturgical framework, but has become a private religious service, which can be celebrated in almost any time, place and human presence. From this follows an obvious simplification of the Baptism ritual (ranging from various omissions of prayers, formulas, rituals or biblical readings to the neglect of the baptismal act itself – the actual immersion).

Fr. Schmemmann insists on the need to *re-establish the liturgical link between Baptism and the Eucharist, between the Mystery of entrance into the Church and the Mystery of the Church*.⁹⁹ In his view, “the only solution then is to re-establish the baptismal liturgy, i.e., to celebrate baptism immediately before the Divine Liturgy and in organic connection with it.”¹⁰⁰ This would entail the participation, at least in part, of the community receiving the newly baptized into its bosom. It would also imply a more pronounced practical emphasis on the solemnity and fullness of the rite of Baptism, which itself contains a large part of what the Mystery signifies.

The other essential conclusive aspect that Father Schmemmann proposes is the rediscovery of the profoundly spiritual function of the nativity in a society increasingly (sometimes almost exclusively) subjugated to the material. Father Schmemmann’s suggestions are as follows: at least one of the godparents be appointed by the priest, from among the most active, conscientious and religiously instructed parishioners; he should be entrusted with the “keeping” of the godchild and should report to the priest on all matters related to the spiritual formation of the godchild; the existence of a parish register of Baptisms (in addition to the usual one), in which all the facts concerning the religious life of each baptized person are recorded; a family in the parish should be appointed to give birth to any new convert, to facilitate his integration into the life of the parish. By regulating this aspect, we can indeed speak of Baptism as the beginning of a process which tends towards fulfillment, and not as an end in itself or as an exhaustion of its value by its mere ritual celebration. The fully informed assumption of the role of godparenthood can have far-reaching positive repercussions on the spiritual life of a community, not only for the individual but also for the social and community life, and can make a substantial contribution to the spiritual revitalization of the life of the community.

⁹⁹ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 183.

¹⁰⁰ Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh*, 184.